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Abstract

The influence of Saint-Augustine on the moral literature of the seventeenth-century cannot be overlooked. The thinking of Port-Royal and the Jansenists influenced the works of Pascal and La Rochefoucauld. In the writings of La Rochefoucauld which will be considered in this study, the theme of self-love in the Maximes tends to confirm the important role of Augustinian philosophy. However, the Maximes and Reflexions Diverses brought to light other currents of thought. Less known texts such as l'Apologie du Prince de Marcillac and the Memoires strongly represent the heroic mind based on the chivalry. This study will show the importance of aristocratic ideology, heroism, and social prejudice on the moral thinking of La Rochefoucauld. First, the different cultures will be defined by using examples from the Maximes. In Augustinism, "wordly" culture appears as a mixture of the religious and the secular cultures. Hence, obvious humour appears in the Maximes. Moreover, a criticism of the monarchy under Louis XIV appears in some maxims. Even the political involvement of the author finds its way into the genre of the maxim itself. The second chapter will examine the links between the aristocratic ideology and Augustinism philosophy. The heroic tone found in some maxims and the author's Memoires is closely related to that of Corneille. Indeed, some maxims concerning self-interest, the passions, nature, moral superiority and courage retain stoic overtones. Thus the concept of Cornelian heroism as formulated in the XIVth century and in the first half of the XVIIth by Du Vair, Montaigne, Charron, and Juste Lipse is still very much alive in the works of La Rochefoucauld.

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